

1-27-99



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Two more studies to be released on Katy Field testing

- One report due next month is an ecological risk assessment.

By JERRY O'BRIEN
Journal Staff Writer

NEWPORT -- A pair of studies on the contamination at Katy Field expected to be released next month could cast additional light on the Superfund site and its effects on the environment.

The draft report of a study on whether chemicals have leached from the site into Narragansett Bay will be released Feb. 23, at the next monthly meeting of the restoration advisory board, according to Capt. A. Cheryl Oakleaf, commander of Naval Station Newport.

Called an ecological risk assessment, the study is being prepared by the Navy and will be released to the public at the board meeting, Oakleaf said Monday night.

The board includes community members and representatives of the federal Environmental Protection Agency and the state Department of Environmental Management, who are monitoring the Navy's cleanup at a dozen polluted sites on the west side of Aquidneck Island.

The meeting is scheduled for 7 p.m. at the officer's club on the Navy base.

The risk assessment then will be reviewed by EPA and DEM officials, who could agree with the findings or take issue with the testing methods and conclusions.

Oakleaf referred to the forthcoming study at a public meeting at the Middletown Town Hall, where the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry announced its judgment that the children and adults who played at Katy Field over the years are not at risk.

Despite the agency's confidence, based in part on a new round of soil samples taken at the playground, park and ballfield, a few parents remained unconvinced.

Those parents believe that past disputes between the Navy and the EPA over the level of contamination, the testing methods used and the safety of children exposed to the soil undermine any new conclusions.

EPA officials said at the meeting that their earlier concerns were

prompted by prudence.

Katy Field is the burial ground of the Navy's former Fire Fighting Training Area. The field and a youth center on the grounds were closed by the Navy in October as the EPA continued its criticism of the Navy's slow response to EPA safety fears.

ATSDR officials Monday night, at a meeting hosted by U. S. Rep. Patrick Kennedy, declared the area fully safe for recreational use. EPA officials agreed, pulling back from their earlier worries after seeing the new test results.

The ATSDR conclusion was a preview of a larger draft study, called a health consultation, which also is due to be released next month for review by the Navy, EPA and DEM.

In addition, the Navy is working on a Remedial Investigation Study, which will guide the future use of the site. That study will include an analysis of soil core samples taken from deep within the ground.

Some of those samples were taken in 1994. The Navy is planning to take additional core samples this summer, officials have said.

"Katy Field is safe for recreational use, but we still have work before us," Oakleaf said at the meeting. "Subsurface soil must be tested to determine future use."

All parties agreed that Katy Field should remain closed "until the final determination is made," as Oakleaf put it.

Kennedy spokesman Larry Berman said last night that Kennedy "was very delighted that the news was so good from the federal officials, but concerned that the people attending somehow seemed skeptical of that good news."

"He believes that the people need to see it in black and white, and they need to digest it," Berman said. "He's hoping that the ATSDR can get a complete copy of the report to these people."

"Then, if they still have more concerns, it's certainly appropriate to convene one more meeting to assuage any of the fears."

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